

Irrigation Canals in the Uinta Basin,
Whiterocks and Ouray Valley Canal
Duchesne Vicinity
Duchesne County
Utah

HAER No. UT-30-H

HAER
UTAH
7-DUCH.V,
1H-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

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Location: Sections 17, 16, 15, 14, 23, 24, T1N, R1E; Sections 19, 30, 31, T1N R2E; Sections 6, 7, 8, 16 T1S, R2E; Sections 10, 15, 23, 26, 35, T5S R19E USM; Sections 2, 11, 12, T6S R19E; Section 7, 18, 19, 30, 31, 32 T6S, R20E
Cities of Whiterocks and LaPoint, Uinta County, Utah

Quad: Whiterocks, LaPoint, Fort Duchesne, Vernal SW

Date of Construction: 1906; 1916

Present Owner: Ouray Park Irrigation Company

Mrs. Eugene (Glenda) Brown
Randlett, Utah

Original Use: Irrigation Canal

Present Use: Irrigation Canal

Significance: The Whiterocks and Ouray Valley Canal is significant for its impact on a large area of the Uinta Basin. The canal is one of the longest in the basin and has one of the largest carrying capacities. The design and history of construction is a noteworthy example of enlarging an already constructed canal to satisfy the needs of several irrigation companies. Finally, the role of William H. Smart and the Colton family, all prominent figures in national, state, and local politics, contributed significantly to the development of the company and area.

A Board of Control, composed of directors from both irrigation companies, was set up to manage and control the jointly used canal. The purpose of joint operation was to secure greater economy and efficiency in use and management of water.

Inventoried by: James Jurale, David Stalheim, Craig Fuller
National Park Service
July 1983

DESCRIPTION AND BACKGROUND HISTORY

Prior to 1916, the Whiterocks and Ouray Valley canals were separate systems, each diverting water from the Whiterocks River. Joined together in 1916, the canal is extremely long (over twenty miles) and scenic, taking its diversion from the Whiterocks River northeast of the Whiterocks townsite and travels in a southeasterly direction, ending near Pelican Lake. The canal has a capacity of 342 second-feet of water at its head. A short distance from the diversion, the canal falls through Merkley Drop, a natural cataract through sandstone cliffs. Further south, the canal goes over Foster Falls through a concrete chute into a settling pond. Near LaPoint, the canal is flumed across Deep Creek.

In May 31, 1916, an agreement was entered into between the Whiterocks Irrigation Company and the Ouray Valley Irrigation Company to enlarge and increase the flow of the Whiterocks Canal and convey the water through the canal to irrigated lands of the Ouray Valley. The Ouray Valley Irrigation Company owned 222 second-feet of water on the Whiterocks. The company was responsible for the expense of enlarging the canal to carry that additional capacity. William H. Smart, a prominent figure in Utah State politics, was president of the irrigation company at this time. Don B. Colton, who later became a U.S. congressman, was secretary of the company. B. O. Colton, surveyor and manager of the company, reported in May 1918 that the cost of enlarging the canal had exceeded the estimate. The cost at that time was \$51,000.

In 1923, Manager B. O. Colton spoke about the financial condition of the company and the work to be done in the valley:

"This year we have 22 families making homes in the valley, while last year we only had 12 families there. We are receiving enquiries regarding the country so that the future looks better than before. Land is being put under cultivation and is producing crops."

[Ouray Valley Irrigation Company Minute Book, January 25, 1923]

The financial condition of the company was desperate, however. The company owed \$40,000 to Deseret Savings of Salt Lake City and \$10,000 to the Bank of Vernal. Instead of foreclosing on the company, the two financial institutions liquidated the indebtedness by acquiring title to the assets of the irrigation company. The stock of the new company was sold back to the water users, with the proceeds paying off the notes. In 1937, the Ouray Valley Irrigation Company merged with the Colorado Park Irrigation Company. The new company took the name Ouray Park Irrigation Company.

REFERENCES

Ouray Valley Irrigation Company, Minute Book, 1916-1931.

Uintah County Recorder, "Water Certificates, Book 2," pp. 222-223.